



136 Management consulting firms in

Azure strategy has future focus



Azure Capital's return to management consulting is an exercise in post-boom diversification.

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WHEN I met with John Poynton last month he was basking in the afterglow of media attention due to his new appointment to the Future Fund board.

There had been a bit of a retrospective look at one of Western Australia's highest-profile business people – a pivotal player as this state emerged from being a racy but small centre for mining speculators to an economy that plays a much more central role in the nation.

In fact, I recall interviewing Mr Poynton more than 10 years ago when he predicted the rise of Perth to muscle out Melbourne in national importance, and described a lot of the industry there as a bit outdated. The word he used was “smokestack”.

While Perth has yet to overtake Melbourne, the mining boom has

certainly hurried that possibility along. Coupled with more recent news of closures of carmakers and aluminium smelters, Mr Poynton's forecast certainly looks on the money.

However, we probably still need the likes of BHP Billiton to properly move its HQ here, and for there to be a truly national approach to opening up the western seaboard to continued population growth before the nation's eastern-centric focus can be shifted.

Nevertheless, the past views and predictions were not the reason I caught up with Mr Poynton last month.

I was more intrigued by the strategy behind his firm's latest foray into management consulting and what lessons it might offer others in business.

At the start of the year, Azure Capital lured respected management consultants Robert Radley and Mark Bosnich to its

Exchange Plaza offices to start a new brand – Azure Consulting.

Both newcomers have career histories that span PwC and Bain & Co, as well as GEM Consulting, the business the founders of Azure had created in the 1990s and sold around the turn of the century when they shifted focus to purely on investment banking.

GEM ended up in the hands of PwC a few years ago.

Since then, WA has become awash in management consultants, with most of the world's major brands opening offices in Perth and claiming they are here to stay.

Azure, in more recent times, dipped a toe in the water with management consulting, backing its former executive James McMahon in his start-up Chauvel Group. That project



has been folded into Azure Consulting and Mr McMahon left to take on the role of Corrective Services commissioner.

So why go back into this field? Well, firstly, it's not the only change at Azure. The firm has been evolving in recent years, poaching Adrian Arundel from KPMG to expand its merchant banking business into the unlisted sector. It has also

launched investment funds and a form of private equity to back several innovative enterprises to capitalise on the growth in the state's north outside of direct involvement in mining.

Azure has not and will not open offices in other states, preferring to work with partners there and expand in its own WA sandbox with new businesses aligned to its investment-banking core.

That is why I find its move into the very competitive and now cutthroat management-consulting sector so intriguing. Mr Poynton and his colleagues are of the view that, as the boom cools, many companies in Perth will be looking for the kind of strategic advice these experienced operators can offer at a price that doesn't carry a global brand on its shoulders.

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ON BOARD: John Poynton (left) welcomed Robert Radley and Mark Bosnich to the team when Azure Capital launched Azure Consulting earlier this year. **Photo: Attila Csaszar**